

ARTSWEEK

Au naturel

There's a particular tingling feeling that comes from standing in a sun-dappled forest as treetops sway spookily in the wind, or walking barefoot over pine needles in the middle of the night to skinny dip in a still black lake. Untamed landscapes give us the sense of being wonderfully, powerfully alive while simultaneously overwhelming us with some unknowable infinity in which we're just meaningless specks.

Our sometimes-ambivalent relationship to the natural world is the theme of *This Side*, the first solo show by photographer **Elena Willis**. Her shadowy, large-scale prints of humans in wild settings evoke the beauty and fear in the forces of nature, often hinting at deeper truths. "I've become very interested in exploring the possibilities of how the inevitability of death gives structure to the way we live our lives," she notes.

Willis doesn't use photography to document moments, instead she carefully stages her shots to achieve a mythical atmosphere. "The work is intuitive," she says. "I want to project the idea of something bigger and greater than ourselves and what we know, surrounding us."

This Side opens tonight, Thursday, April 1, 6 p.m., and runs through April 18 at 372 Ste-Catherine W., Suite 306.

—SARAH MUSGRAVE

